

# PARMENIDES

## Some Prolegomena...

### Who was he?

- » From Elea – a Greek colony in southern Italy
- » Along with his followers (Zeno, Melissus, etc) ushered in a new style/ school of philosophy known as ‘Eleatic philosophy’
- » According to Plato, he came to Athens with Zeno and there met and conversed with “a young Socrates”



### The nature of the textual evidence...

- » A poem in Homeric hexameter, narrating the journey of a young man who is taken to meet a goddess who promises to teach him “all things” (about the *true nature* of reality)

### The structure of the poem...

- » Three parts/divisions: the *Introduction* (Parmenides’ mystical journey to the goddess), the *Way of Truth* (the ‘unshaken heart of persuasive truth’), the *Way of Mortal Opinions* (in which ‘there is no true reliance’)

# PARMENIDES

## The Master Argument...

### The strategy...

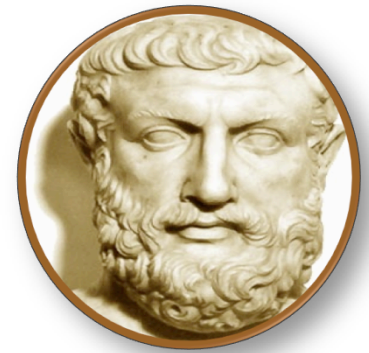
- » One way to carve up Parmenides' overall project is in terms of a two-stage argument for the claim that the *true nature of reality* (he thinks) consists of *one, indivisible, ungenerated, indestructible, unchanging* and *unmoving* thing.

### Stage 1

- » After distinguishing the two different “ways” or “roads” of inquiry, Parmenides then proceeds to argue against one of these “ways” in favor of the other. The central thesis (CT) underwriting stage 1 is the claim that it is impossible to think or speak—at least, meaningfully and coherently—about “what IS NOT”

### Stage 2

- » After presenting his case for (CT), Parmenides then argues that a number of (startling) consequences follow logically from (CT)



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## The Master Argument...

### Stage 1 (premises 1-2) | Stage 2 (premises 3-4)

1. The true nature of reality consists of either “what IS” or “what IS NOT”
  2. (CT) It is impossible to think or speak—at least, meaningfully and coherently—about “what IS NOT”
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3. Given (CT), any notion that relies upon/makes an appeal to “what IS NOT” ought to be abandoned
  4. Since the notions of plurality, divisibility, generation, destruction, change and movement all rely/make and appeal to “what IS NOT”, they ought to be abandoned
  5. Therefore, true nature of reality consists (exclusively) of “what IS”—namely: *one, indivisible, ungenerated, indestructible, unchanging and unmoving* thing.



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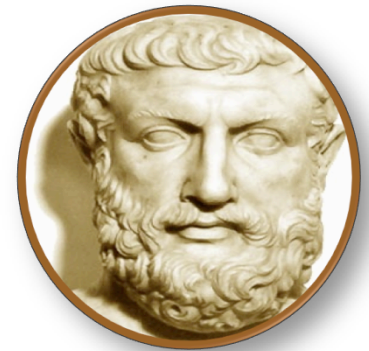
## The Textual Evidence (stage 1)...

*“Come now, I will tell you ... the only ways of inquiry there are for thinking: the one, that IT IS and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth), the other, that IT IS NOT and that it is necessary for it not to be, this I point out to you to be a path completely unlearnable, for neither may you know that which is not (for it is not to be accomplished) nor may you declare it.”*

*“For the same thing is for thinking and for being... [and] that which is there to be spoken and thought of must be. For it is possible for it to be, but not possible for nothing to be. I bid you consider this...”*

*“...the decision about these matters lies in this: [either] IT IS or IT IS NOT. But it has been decided, as is necessary, to let go the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it IS NOT a true way) and that the other IS and is real...”*

*“There is still left a single story of a way, that IT IS...” (to be continued)*

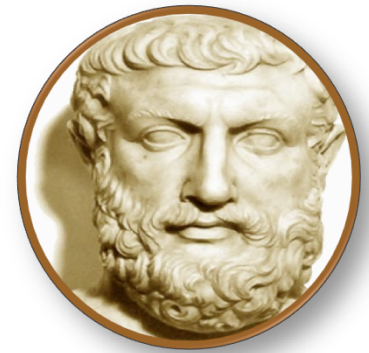


# PARMENIDES

## The Textual Evidence (stage 2)...

*“On this way there are signs exceedingly many—that being ungenerated it is also imperishable, whole and of a single kind and unshaken and complete...”*

*“Nor was it ever nor will it be, since it is now, all together one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it? How and from where did it grow? I will not permit you to say or to think that it grew from what is not; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not. What necessity would have stirred it up to grow later rather than earlier, beginning from nothing? Thus it must either fully be or not...”*



# PARMENIDES

## Evaluating The Argument...

### Two key questions...

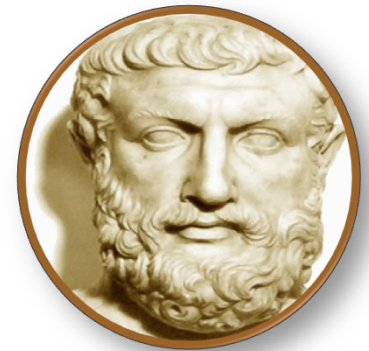
- » There are two questions that need to be asked when it comes to the evaluation of arguments: (1) does the conclusion of the argument really follow (logically) from the premises of the argument? and (2) are the premises of the argument true (or at least believable)?

### Does the conclusion really follow?

- » The form of the argument is *valid*– Either A or B; Not B; Therefore A.

### Are the premises true (or at least plausible)?

- » Premises 1, 2 and 3 seem to be ok (or at least plausible)
- » Premise 4 also seems to be well supported once one conducts a careful consideration of the notions of plurality, divisibility, generation, destruction, change and movement– *“For what birth will you seek for it? How and from where did it grow? I will not permit you to say or to think that it grew from what is not; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not. What necessity would have stirred it up to grow later rather than earlier, beginning from nothing? Thus it must either fully be or not...”*



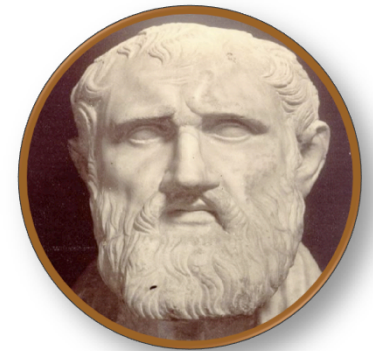


# ZENO

## Some Paradoxical Support...

### Zeno's strategy...

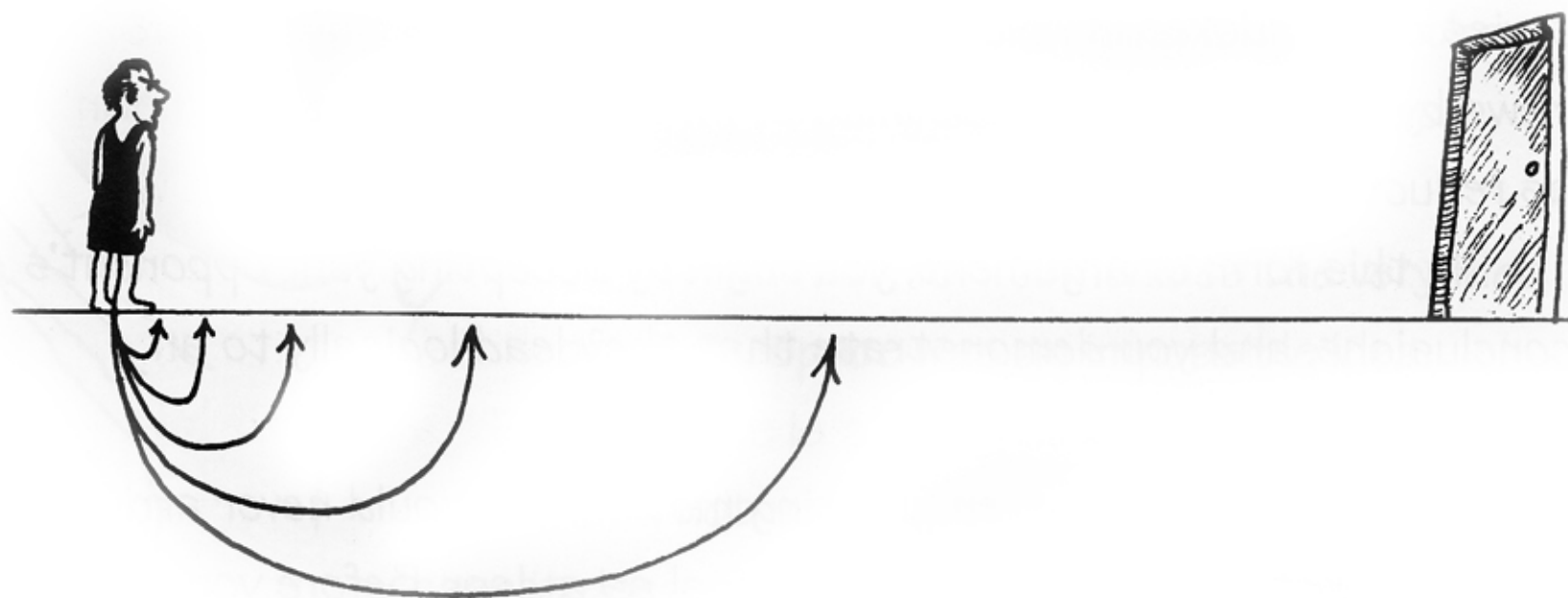
- » Rather than defending his teacher's views directly, Zeno attacked the assumptions of his opponents, aiming to expose the paradoxes inherent in them. In other words, first adopt the position of Parmenides' critics and then argue that one or more absurd conclusions seem to follow (*reductio ad absurdum*)



### The Paradoxes of Motion

- » Zeno argues that it is impossible for a runner to traverse a race course. His reason is that "motion is impossible, because an object in motion must reach the half-way point before it gets to the end" (Aristotle, Physics 239b11-13).
- » Why is this a problem? Because the same argument can be made about *half* of the race course: it can be divided in half in the same way that the entire race course can be divided in half. And so can the half of the half of the half, and so on, *ad infinitum*.







*True Reality = “The One”, “what IS” “Pure Being”*



*Bertrand Russell once remarked that "the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end up with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it..."*

*Our own Nathan Salmon has said that--like Russell--his objective in doing philosophy has been "to proceed by a sequence of obviously valid inferences (though not always controversial) from clearly correct premises (though not generally indubitable) to a significant but unpopular thesis..., or at least a rather surprising one..."*